

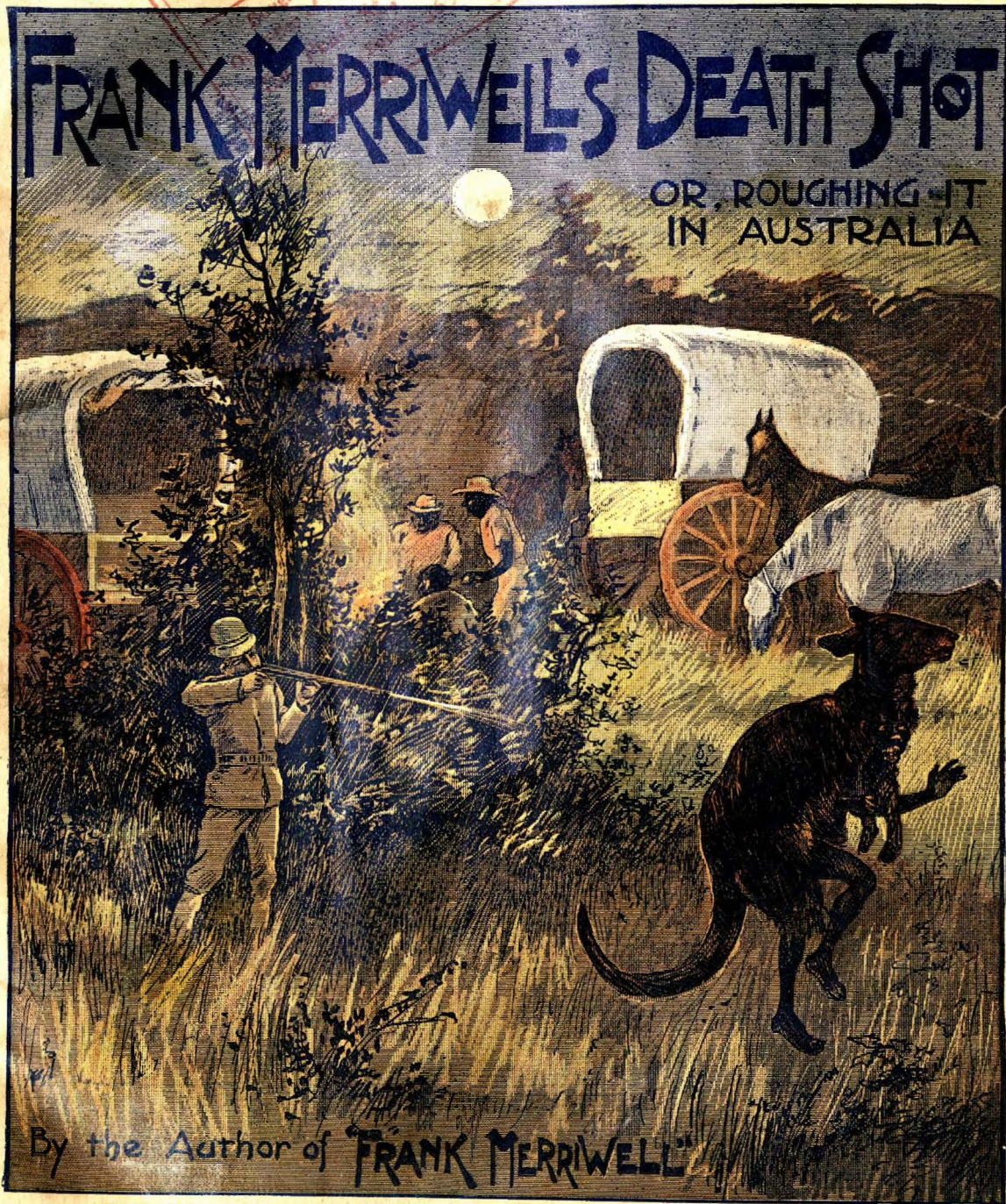
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December 26, 1896.

Vol. I. No. 37.

Price Five Cents.



AS FRANK FIRED THERE WAS A SHRILL SCREAM, AND THE KANGAROO LEAPED INTO THE AIR.



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FRANK MERRIWELL'S DEATH SHOT; OR, Roughing It in Australia.

By the Author of "FRANK MERRIWELL."

CHAPTER I.

THE MAN WITH THE BELT OF GOLD.

"It is worth ten thousand dollars at least," softly declared one of the two men behind the screen.

"What's that?" gasped the other man in astonishment.

"It is true."

"Say, Bill, you're joking!"

"There is no joke about it, Jack."

"But how can that man's belt be worth so much?"

"See how wide it is?"

"Yes."

"And it looks as if it is stuffed with something?"

"Yes."

"Well, it is."

"With what?"

"Gold!"

Bill whispered the final word, but just beyond the screen, which served to make the corner of the saloon a semi-private drinking booth, was a boy whose keen ears had missed nothing that passed between the two ruffianly-appearing fellows.

That boy was Frank Merriwell, who, bent on seeing the sights of Sydney, Aus-

tralia, in which city he had landed the previous day, had wandered into this cheap groggery, which was located in a rather tough quarter of the city.

Frank's curiosity sometimes led him into extremely dangerous adventures.

As he passed the screen, the boy had noted the two men in the corner. One was big and rough, while the other was small, with black beard and eyes and a stealthy, sneaky manner. Both of them looked like rascals, and as they had their heads close together, the boy instantly decided they were plotting something that meant harm to somebody.

Frank sat down at a table near the screen. There was a pack of cards on the table, and he pretended to engage in a game of solitaire, in which he soon seemed deeply engrossed.

All the while the boy was observing what was taking place in the saloon, well satisfied to note that his entrance had not attracted particular attention.

Near the bar was a stout, broad-shouldered man, plainly and roughly dressed, wearing a wide-brimmed hat and long-legged, mud-bespattered boots. He had a full brown beard and long, curling hair, which fell upon the collar of his coat. He

was nearly fifty years of age, and was a handsome man, in a rough way, being superbly built, apparently possessing great strength and energy. He reminded Frank of a lion.

In some respects this man was like the typical Western adventurer of the United States.

Around his waist he wore a wide and bulging leather belt. When Frank first entered the man's coat was buttoned, so the belt could not be seen, but he was drinking, and it was not long before he seemed to get warm, upon which he unbuttoned his coat and flung it back, exposing the belt.

If the man had not betrayed by his dress and appearance that he did not belong in the city no one would have remained long in doubt on that point, for he drank freely and talked still more freely.

"This is the first time I have been in Sydney for eighteen months," he said, leaning his back against the bar, upon which his elbows rested. "Sydney is a great place—she grows and she booms. A man who is away a year and a half and then comes back is bound to see the difference quick enough. This is a great country, anyway—greatest on the face of the earth. We can raise anything here from potatoes to pineapples, chickens to ostriches, sheep to mastadons. And the ground is stuffed full of mineral wealth. All you've got to do is to go out and find it. Gold is more plentiful in Australia than gravel is in some countries. Everybody come up and take a drink with me."

Frank smiled to himself. He had heard men like this one in the United States. They were to be found all over the West, and they could boast about the resources of their particular section of the country in language that was wildly extravagant, sometimes strongly impressing those who were not accustomed to that sort of thing.

"My name is Morgan," said the man with the belt as he stood with a glass of whisky in his hand, gazing at the eager bums who had accepted his invitation and gathered round to have a drink.

"That's all there is to it—just plain Morgan. If I ever had any front name or other side attachments, I have forgotten all about it. Everybody drink with Morgan."

"It is evident that you are bent on getting loaded," thought the boy. "Ten to one you will be robbed if you have anything left about you that is worth taking. It's strange how a man with good horse sense can be such a fool! But lots of them do it."

"Some time," continued Morgan in an oracular manner, "Australia will show the world what she is made of. Some time she will run herself to suit herself, without any dictations from a government thousands of miles away. Oh, I am a loyal subject of the queen, don't you forget that; but I can see what is coming. I have an eye for the future."

"Any man with snap and grit can make money in this country. Lots of 'em has picked up a fortune in a day or so. The ground is full of it. You fellows who hang around here can't make a big strike. You want to get out into the gold districts and see what you can do."

"Are you from the gold districts?" asked one.

"Oh, I've been there," was the reply, his hand resting carelessly on his broad belt. "I've been almost everywhere in this country."

"Did you ever stumble over a bushel of gold that you could pick up and carry off for the trouble of doing so?"

"Did I? Well, say, Johnny. I have found lots of things in my life that I never told anybody about."

The man who asked the question protested that he "didn't mean anything,"

and Morgan assured him that it was all right.

Then Frank, who had leaned back close to the screen, heard the two men in the corner speaking of the belt the stranger wore about his waist.

Frank had not taken a seat there to play the eavesdropper, but he distinctly heard the conversation given at the beginning of this chapter.

"It is pretty sure these fellows will attempt to relieve Mr. Morgan of his belt," thought the lad. "He must be warned. He ought not to take another drink."

Frank was trying to devise a plan to warn Morgan, when something the plotters were saying caused him to hold his breath and listen once more.

"How shall we go about the job, Bill?"

"Same old way."

"Drug him?"

"Yes."

"All right."

"Have you any of the stuff?"

"Enough to fix him, I fancy."

"Good! We must take charge of him, and we'll run him out of here as soon as he begins to get drowsy."

"We'll have to. Old Jimmy won't have a gent relieved of his valuables in this place, but the old cuss allows us to drug 'em here as long as he gets a share of the boodle."

"He is a cautious old sinner."

"Yes; he was sent to this country for a little job in England."

At this moment Morgan was heard loudly crying:

"It's time to have another, gentlemen. Come up, everybody, this time. You must drink."

"Now's the chance, Jack," hissed one of the men behind the screen.

"Yes; I'll do the trick if I can. Attract his attention while I am at it. Come on."

They started for the bar.

"I think I will be in this," muttered Frank Merriwell as he left his seat and followed them.

CHAPTER II.

FRANK'S LITTLE GAME.

Frank knew it would not do to go straight up to Morgan and warn him of his peril. The chances were that the man would not believe it, or, angered by such exposure, the two ruffians might call on the others, and the whole gang attack the man and boy.

Frank had arrived at a belief that there was a quarter of Sydney fully as low and depraved as the East End of London. In London he had been appalled by the vice and crime which was to be found in certain quarters, and it seemed that this great Australian city was not far behind London, or was actually more depraved, considering its size.

In the United States Frank had found Chicago more abandoned than New York. This had been a great surprise for him, as he had always supposed New York the wickedest city in America.

But in traveling about the world the boy had arrived at the belief that Chicago and New York were mild in comparison with some cities.

While a man might be assaulted and robbed in some parts of New York if found there alone at night, he was certain to be assaulted and robbed in certain parts of London if he went there alone in the middle of the day.

And Sydney, considering its size, was quite equal to London.

The grog shop which Frank had entered was on the border of the dangerous section. It was located near the section known as "the Rocks," where the criminal classes lived in the rookeries which abounded there. Into this dangerous section the police rarely penetrated, unless in pursuit of a criminal, and all honest

men who knew the city kept as far away as possible.

Frank had heard about this section of the city, and, with his usual daring and natural curiosity to see such things that most travelers would not bother to look at, he had ventured into the outskirts of the region where no honest man lived, and where all the wretched creatures who lived there obtained their daily bread by criminal acts.

To this section sailors were often enticed, plied with drugged liquor, and robbed. To this section often came the miner who had tossed aside the pick and shovel for the time and was bent on having "a lark." Often the miner was strangely missing, and the secret of another crime was known alone to a few wretches of "the Rocks."

Frank was plainly, almost roughly, dressed, and there was no display of jewelry anywhere about his person. While he looked respectable, he would not have been selected as a person on whom a large sum of money could be found.

In some things the boy was cautious. He seldom carried much money about with him, and he never displayed what he had. Under his arms, within the lining of his coat, were secret pockets, in which he might stow away money in large bills, and there was not one chance in a hundred that any one searching him could find it.

The boy looked the two plotters over keenly as he advanced toward the bar. Although the one called Jack was certainly familiar with the city and seemed to be the leader for the time, Frank decided that his companion was the most dangerous.

Bill was a big fellow, with a bull-dog jaw and a drooping mustache. He looked like a man of some intelligence, but it seemed that he had fallen into criminal ways by force of circumstances instead of by natural inclination.

The small man was naturally a criminal, but at the same time he was a coward. He would not have the recklessness to plunge headlong into anything without counting the cost, and therefore Bill was the most dangerous.

"Fill up! fill up!" cried the man with the belt of gold as the loafers about the place crowded about the bar. "Everybody in the place have a drink with me!"

Frank had noticed that there was a small pitcher of water set out for those who wished a "chaser" after drinking, and the boy resolved on a scheme.

He called for gin, pretending to turn some in a glass and mix it with water. In fact, he took all water, and not a drop of gin, and as both liquids were colorless he was not detected.

Bill pretended to be drunk already, and Jack took a position close to Morgan, which the others readily made for him.

Frank Merriwell was close to this group, with his eyes open and his wits working.

"Mr. Morgan," cried Bill, slapping the stranger on the shoulder, "you're a brick! Give us your hand."

And then he got hold of the man's hand and wrung it earnestly.

In the mean time Jack dropped something from his fingers into the glass of whisky that had been poured for Morgan.

The men turned to take up their glasses.

Frank saw that he must work quickly, if at all.

"Hold on!" cried a voice that seemed to come from a distant corner of the room. "Why don't you fellows wait for me?"

Every man turned to see who had spoken.

In a twinkling Frank changed the glasses, so that Bill would receive the drugged liquor.

"To the surprise of the men about the

bar, they could see no one who had called to them from the rear of the room.

"Some fellow must be under a table," said one. "If he's got such a load that he can't get out, let him stay there."

"Well, here's to the man under the table," cried Morgan as he caught up a glass of whisky and tossed it off at a swallow.

The others all drank, and Frank swallowed his water.

"Now," said Bill, "everybody have another on me. I've got the coin. Fill up."

Once more he attracted Morgan's attention, talking earnestly to him, while Jack again dropped something in the man's glass.

"Yes," cried Bill, "this is a great country. Gold—why, there's plenty of it. Jack and me are going prospecting after gold, eh, Jack?"

"Oh, we may," replied the more cautious rascal.

"We're going!" declared Bill. "We're going to start to-night."

"Well," said Morgan, turning to the bar, "here's luck to you."

As he reached for his glass the mysterious voice was again heard to cry:

"Hold on! This is what I call using a fellow dirty! I am choking for a drink!"

All turned toward the point from whence the voice seemed to proceed, and again Frank changed the glasses, this time giving the drugged liquor to Jack.

"Where are you?" called one of the barkeepers, peering into every corner. "Come up here if you want a drink."

But no one came.

"That is singular," remarked Bill, drowsily, forcing his eyes wide open with an effort. "I don't understand it."

"This is no game of hide and seek," said Jack, angrily. "Let the fellow choke!"

Then they all turned back and drank,

Frank once more taking water instead of gin.

The boy was well satisfied with what he accomplished, and he awaited developments. He could see that Bill was beginning to get drowsy already.

To the boy's satisfaction, the liquor did not seem to have any farther effect on Morgan, and it became evident that he could carry off a large amount of the stuff, vile though it was.

Bill tried to talk. He leaned on the bar and directed his conversation at Morgan. Jack leaned on the bar and watched. Frank Merriwell, smiling to himself, stood back and kept his eyes open.

As the moments passed, Bill grew more and more sleepy and Jack rubbed his own eyes. Morgan was as lively as ever. The two plotters looked at each other. With a great effort Bill braced up, muttering:

"Dunno what's the matter with me. I seem to be used up. Can hardly keep my eyes open. I—I think——"

He mumbled and stopped speaking. All at once he braced up again, glared at his companion, and snarled:

"Jack, you're a blundering fool! I'm done up!"

Then he staggered to a chair, into which he dropped, letting his arms fall on the table before him and his head fall on his arms. In a moment he was asleep.

Jack stared sullenly at Morgan. All at once he snatched out a knife and made a cut at the man's back.

Frank saw the move and he knocked the fellow over in a twinkling.

Jack struggled to his feet, put his hand to his forehead, staggered to a chair opposite his partner in crime, fell upon it, and let his head drop on his arms.

The two rascals had been baffled by a quick-witted and daring boy.

CHAPTER III.

FRANK EXPLAINS.

Morgan, the man with the belt of gold, did not fully realize what had happened. He looked sharply at Frank and asked:

"What made you hit that man?"

"He attempted to drive a knife into your back, sir," said the lad, quietly.

"And you prevented it by knocking him over? Why, you're only a boy!"

Frank flushed. He was growing tired of being called "only a boy."

"What if I am 'only a boy,' " he said.

"You are only a man."

"Hey-ho!" cried Morgan, observing the flush on the lad's cheeks. "Don't mind what I said. If you are 'only a boy,' you have the nerve of a man."

Frank was silent, and the man with the belt of gold suddenly held out a hand.

"By lightning!" he cried, "I want to shake your fin, lad! Put it there! That's right! Yours for ninety days!"

Frank allowed his fingers to be crushed in Morgan's rough clasp.

"You've saved my life, my boy!" said the man, who was beginning to realize the extent of the boy's service, "and Morgan is not the man to forget anything like that. What can I do for you?"

Frank had been wondering how he could get the man out of that quarter, and at this question he quickly thought of a scheme.

"I am a stranger in the city," he said, "and I came in here to ask the way to the Royal George Hotel."

"Thunder and lightning! but this is a strange place and a strange quarter for a boy like you! You are entirely out of your element. The Royal George is in a distant part of the city."

"If you wish to do me a favor in return for the one I did you, you may show me the way there."

"By the eternal stars! I'll do it, boy."

Have one more drink with me, and then we will go. What do you take?"

"I have had quite enough, thank you."

"Oh, one more will not hurt you. Give him the same."

But Frank had accomplished his object in pretending to drink liquor at the bar, and he now firmly refused to take anything more.

"You are right," said Morgan after he had stared at the lad a moment. "My surprise is that a lad like you should drink at all."

Frank smiled, but did not tell him then that he had touched nothing but water.

The bummers and sharks about the place did not wish to see a man like Morgan taken away so soon. They crowded about him, trying to take his attention from the boy. One of them shook Jack and Bill, trying to awaken the foiled rascals, but such efforts were fruitless.

Frank remained close by Morgan, his eyes wide open, for he was aware that they were in the midst of a desperate gang. Had they been deeper toward the heart of the section known as "the Rocks," it is quite certain they could not have escaped without farther trouble.

The boy was afraid Morgan would remain at the bar and continue to drink; but as soon as he had treated all round once more and settled his score, the man straightened up, saying:

"Come on, lad. Now we'll slide out for the Royal George."

In vain the rascals clung to the man, one of them wishing to treat, another having a good story to tell, and yet another offering to accompany the boy to the hotel if Morgan would stay.

The man with the belt of gold flung them all off with a sweep of his powerful arms.

"Get out of my way!" he cried. "I

have stayed here too long, and now I am going with the boy."

Frank was well satisfied by this, but he kept his eyes open to see that another attempt was not made on Morgan's life.

Before leaving the saloon, the strange man walked over to the table at which the two plotters were sleeping, grasped Jack by the hair of the head and lifted him so the light shone full on his face.

"There," said Morgan, with satisfaction, letting the head fall back on the sprawling arms, "I shall know that fellow when we meet again. Tried to stick me with a knife, did he! Well, it is not best he crosses my track when he is sober!"

Then he walked out of the saloon, never paying the slightest heed to the men who were urging him to remain long enough to "have one more."

Frank was close behind Morgan, and there was a feeling of genuine satisfaction in the boy's breast, for he believed he had saved the man from being robbed and murdered.

"Who are you, boy?" asked the man when they had reached the dark street and were moving away.

"My name is Frank Merriwell," was the reply.

"And you are a stranger in Sydney, did you say?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where are you from?"

"America."

"The United States?"

"Yes, sir."

"How do you happen to be here?"

"I am traveling."

Morgan uttered an exclamation of surprise, and peered through the darkness at the companion at his side.

"Where are you traveling?" asked the man.

"Around the world. I am bound home again when I leave here."

"Who are you traveling with?"

"I am traveling alone at present."

The man with the belt of gold whistled softly, and Frank fancied he was inclined to be a bit incredulous.

"You are rather young to be knocking around over the world alone," said Morgan after some moments of silence.

"Do you think so?"

The man's hand fell on the lad's shoulder.

"Now don't be quick to take offense with me, my boy," he said. "I am rough. It is natural I should be, for I have spent years in the mines. By lightning! it is a wonder to me that I am not rougher. I have seen little of the smooth side of life since coming to this country. I have starved and choked and froze and roasted in this country. I have burrowed in the ground and I have tramped the mountains and plains. But I struck it at last, and there will be no more choking and starving. I did have a good education, but I have become illiterate by mingling with ignorant men. I did have good morals, but I have become degraded by being forced to live with the most degraded of human beings."

The words came rather bitterly from Morgan's lips, causing Frank to regard the strange man with fresh interest. There was something about the owner of the golden belt that attracted the boy.

"You should not drink in such a place as that when——"

"Hold on there!" interrupted the man. "You can't preach to me, for you drank there."

"Only water."

"Water? Why, you called for gin."

"Did you ever observe much difference in the color of gin and water?"

"No, but——"

"Not a drop of gin did I touch. Both times I drank water."

"What was your object?"

"I do not drink liquors of any kind, sir."

"But you came up to the bar and you pretended to drink."

"I came up to the bar to see if I could not save you from being drugged and robbed. I succeeded."

Now Morgan was surprised.

"Drugged and robbed?" he echoed.

"You saved me from being stabbed in the back, and you shall be well repaid. I have gold——"

"Ten thousand dollars' worth of it in the belt about your waist," said Frank, quietly.

The man wheeled and clutched the boy with both hands.

"How do you know that?" he hoarsely demanded.

"I am not the only one who knew it in that dive."

"By lightning! this is interesting! Who else knew it?"

"The man who tried to drive a knife into your back."

"And that was why he tried the trick, was it?"

"You have guessed it."

"Eternal stars! how do you know so much?"

"There was yet another who knew all about it."

"Who?"

"The one who first fell asleep at the table."

"Is that straight?"

"It is."

"And they were pals?"

"Yes, sir."

"I see their game! But how did you know they knew so much?"

"I heard them plotting to drug you and rob you of your belt."

"Boy, you are a brick! You heard the plot and resolved to help me out of a bad hole. That was nerve. You did the trick all right. Give us your hand again! Put it there for a hundred years!"

Morgan grasped Frank's hand and gave it a hearty, grateful grip.

"All men are fools," he said. "Some are bigger fools than others. I was a fool to go down there with this stuff about me, but I arrived in Sidney too late to dispose of it to-night. It has been more than a year since I was here last, and I felt like having a time. Like a fool, I took to drinking. It is a wonder I am alive now. I have you to thank for it, boy."

He was sincere in his gratitude. All at once a thought came to him, and he peered sharply at Frank through the darkness.

"What struck those two rascals that they were knocked out so quickly?" he asked.

"They were struck by their own knock-out drops," laughed Frank.

"How was that?"

"They drank the liquor that was doctored for you, sir."

"How did they happen to drink it?"

"I changed the glasses after the stuff had been put into the liquor."

"You did?"

"Sure."

"How could it be done without detection?"

"Do you remember the mysterious voice?"

"Yes."

"Well, everybody turned from the bar when that voice was heard."

"They did."

"That was my time."

"Boy, you are a cooler! You are ahead of anything of your age in boots! But how did it happen that the voice was heard at exactly the right moment each time?"

"I made it heard then."

"You made it heard? How could you do that?"

"That was dead easy," laughed Frank. "I am something of a ventriloquist, and

the mysterious voice came from my own throat, that is all."

CHAPTER IV.

A STRUGGLE AGAINST ODDS.

The man with the belt of gold was more amazed than ever.

"I am just beginning to understand what you have done for me to-night," he said. "It is remarkable."

"Oh, it wasn't much," said Frank, modestly. "It was dead easy, and I found it fun to fool the fellows."

"My boy, you have made the hit of your life to-night. I'll make you rich for this piece of work!"

Morgan spoke as if thoroughly in earnest, and Frank could not doubt that he meant what he said.

"I do not ask a reward for doing anything like that," said the lad. "It is no more than any honest person should do for another. I did not dare go straight to you and tell you that I knew you were in deadly danger. You were drinking, and it sometimes is not easy to reason with a man who has taken considerable liquor."

"Which shows you are shrewd as well as nervy."

"My only wonder," said Frank, glancing back, "is that we have not been followed and attacked. I expected—Look out! Here they come!"

He had caught a glimpse of dark figures skulking swiftly forward. At the same moment other dark figures came down a side street and cut them off in advance, so they were hemmed in. A sharp whistle cut the air, and the ruffians closed in.

Frank felt a loose paving stone beneath his feet. He stooped and caught it up. As the nearest ruffian came on, the boy raised the stone with both hands and hurled it at the man. The fellow dodged

downward, and the stone barely escaped his head; but it struck in the breast a man behind him, and down that man went.

Frank was armed, but he did not like to use his revolver unless forced to do so.

Morgan gave a roar like a lion, dashed his hat to the ground, and met the first ruffian squarely.

The ruffian had a knife, but it did not reach Morgan, who caught the assailant's wrist, held him fast, wrenched the blade away, and swung the man into the air.

As the next ruffian came on his companion was dashed against him, and he went down with the fellow on top of him.

"Eternal stars!" roared Morgan. "Here is where we show our mettle. Sail into them, Frank Merriwell, and we will send them flying."

No need to tell Frank to sail in. The boy was already hard at it, and he was having great success.

Having knocked over one man with the paving stone, Frank saw the other leap forward from a crouching position, his hand uplifted.

The boy sprung as if to meet the fellow, but dropped close to the ground, striking the man's legs at the knee.

Over the boy's body plunged the ruffian, falling headlong upon the ground, where he lay for a moment, somewhat stunned.

Frank was up like a cat, and he saw others coming on.

"Oh, for another paving stone!" he muttered.

But there was no stone ready for his hand, and another assailant was on him before he could draw his revolver.

This man tried to clutch the boy, and he lifted something like a sand bag, with which he struck viciously at Frank's head.

Right under the man's uplifted arm

darted the lad, whirled like a cat, and as he came round gave the fellow a terrific blow behind the ear.

Down dropped the ruffian, and a second later Frank had secured the sand bag.

That was the very weapon he desired, and he turned to see how the man with the belt of gold was faring.

Twice as many ruffians had set upon the man as upon the boy, and Morgan had placed his back against a wall, while he was using his heavy fists to beat them off.

Crack! crack! the blows fell thick and fast. Men reeled back before them, but leaped forward again, like famished tigers.

"Hurrah!" shouted Merriwell, seeming to enjoy the battle. "Give it to them, Morgan—I am with you!"

Then he came upon the ruffians from behind.

Smash! the sand bag fell with stunning force, and a man dropped. Smash! again the boy brought the weapon down, and another man fell.

"By lightning!" cried Morgan as he planted his fist with force enough to send yet another to the ground. "We are good for the entire gang, boy!"

The ruffians had not expected such a reception, and they could not stand it long. They had hoped and believed that they would take the two intended victims by surprise and overcome them easily.

Frank continued to wield the sand bag, and Morgan became aggressive. Then the bruised and battered gang gave up and took to flight, skulking away in the darkness.

Frank Merriwell laughed as if he had been highly entertained.

"It was easy," he cried. "Why, it was a regular snap."

"Boy," said Morgan, who was breathing heavily, "you are the kind to make

fast to, and that is right. I am somewhat of a fighter myself, and you make a good mate."

"Oh, I am a hot cake of ice," was the merry retort. "But it might be a good scheme to get out of this while we have a chance."

"That is true. Although I doubt it, it is possible those rascals may come back to look for us again. Come, boy."

They hastened onward.

CHAPTER V.

THE GOLD FEVER.

Leaving the dangerous quarter of the city, the man and the boy were soon seated in a tram car that was carrying them toward the Royal George.

Frank Merriwell wondered not a little at the mode of street conveyance in use upon many of the principal streets of Sydney, for two cars were coupled together, and these were drawn by noisy, smoke-dispensing little locomotives.

It seemed that accidents must be frequent, but Frank had been told that they rarely happened. Then he thought of the numbers of persons maimed and killed by the electric and cable cars in America and was silent.

The street cars of Sydney stopped at certain designated points, and flagmen were placed at what were considered extra-hazardous crossings.

Nothing but an accident could stop the cars at any but the regular places, which were separated by a general distance of about two blocks.

Morgan became silent and grave after they were seated in the car. Once in a while he looked searchingly at the boy, and what he saw seemed to satisfy him, judging by the expression on his face.

Such an adventure as they had passed through would have unnerved many lads, but Merriwell seemed as cool and unconcerned as if nothing serious had happened.

"He is made of the right stuff," thought the man with the belt of gold. "I'll square my account with him."

At last, after leaving the car and walking a block, they came to the hotel, and Frank took Morgan up to his room.

"There," said the boy, "make yourself at home. The thugs of 'the Rocks' will not follow us here."

"By lightning!" exclaimed Morgan, "I scarcely think they will care to follow us anywhere. I am a great fighter, boy, and you are not slow yourself. Together we will make a fast team."

Frank smiled.

"We ought to be able to take care of ourselves," he said.

Morgan flung his hat into a corner and deposited himself on a comfortable chair. He took out a pipe and a plug of tobacco. With a long bright knife he whittled pieces off the tobacco.

"I might have used this toad sticker," he said, "but I don't like to do it. I have seen such things used too much in my time."

A cloud came to his rugged face, as if he had been assailed by a recollection that was far from pleasant.

When the man had filled and lighted his pipe he said:

"I don't think I quite understand how it is that you happen to be traveling alone. Will you make it clear?"

Frank did so, and the man listened with interest.

"I have seen enough to satisfy me that you are a very unusual boy," said Morgan when Frank had finished. "Do you want to make a fortune?"

"Of course I do."

Morgan unbuckled his belt and passed it to Frank.

"Feel the weight of that," he directed.

Frank took it in his hand, expecting it would be heavy, but he was astonished by its weight. Morgan laughed as he took the belt back. Then, after some trouble,

he opened one end of the belt, turning out a flap of leather, upon which he poured some of the contents of the belt.

It was gold sure enough—dull yellow gold, in fine grains and small nuggets about the size of peas.

"It is the genuine stuff," declared the owner of the belt. "How long do you think it took me to get this amount?"

"A year, perhaps."

Morgan smiled.

"It took me just four days," he asserted. "I don't know how much the contents of this belt will come to, but I shall know in the morning. Why, the earth where I struck this stuff is full of it. I believe there is enough of it to make a hundred men rich."

There was a flush on the man's weather-beaten cheeks, and he pulled nervously at the pipe, quite unaware that it had gone out and he was drawing no smoke.

Frank Merriwell began to grow excited. He felt an expanding sensation in his breast and a thrill that ran all over him. He breathed quickly and his temples throbbed. The sight of the yellow stuff was giving him a touch of the gold fever.

"If I had lost this stuff I could return and dig out more," said Morgan.

"If you had not lost your life with it."

"Of course."

"Those wretches might have killed you to keep you still, even after they had drugged and robbed you."

"Right, boy! Oh, I know how much I owe you, and I am going to square the score. Day after to-morrow I start for the mountains again, and you shall go with me if you want to."

"Are you sure you can return to the spot where you found this gold?"

"Sure! Look here."

Morgan took out a leather case, from which he extracted a sheet of paper. When the paper was spread out, it was seen that there was a map, or chart, crudely drawn upon it.

"Here," said Morgan, pointing with the stem of his pipe, "is the Alpine range, and there are the Blue Mountains."

"I see."

"Do you see that river?"

"Yes."

"Well, it did not run there once. There was a time when it ran along this dotted line."

"Its course has changed greatly."

"Yes. Right there at that point where it makes a sudden bend the old channel was choked, and the river was turned so it made this wide detour and came back to its former channel away down here. That left a hundred miles of the original river bed dry."

"Go on," breathlessly urged the boy.

"When the channel was choked and the river was turned it made my fortune, boy—and yours!"

"How was that?"

"For the last five years I have been prospecting in the Alpine range. I was told I was a fool to hunt for gold there when I might go north into Queensland and stand a show of striking it. But I found signs of the stuff, and I believed in prospecting where prospectors were not thick. I hung to the Alpine range, and in the Blue Mountains I struck the stuff at last. It was buried in the dry bed of the river."

"You were fortunate."

"I knew it must come. Look here; see where I followed the dry bed of the river down here for about fifty miles. And there—right there where I made the cross—I struck it. In four days I took out the gold I have in this belt, and there's cart-loads left!"

Frank was astonished at the excitement he felt. He could scarcely keep quiet. He felt himself seized by a mad desire to rush away to the dry bed of the river and dig in the golden sand with his bare hands. By a mighty effort he held himself in check.

"Talk of Monte Cristo!" laughed Morgan. "Why, I'll be his equal some day! I didn't come to this country because I wanted to, and when I leave it I will look for some people I used to know. I told them they would hear from me again some day, and they will."

"Let's see," said the boy; "the Blue Mountains cannot be far from Kanack Land?"

"No, they are just beyond Kanack Land."

"I have intended all along to visit Mark Bentley, a sheep raiser of Kanack Land. He is an American, and was one of my father's schoolmates."

"It is on our way to the mountains."

"Well, I can go part way with you, Mr. Morgan."

"Part way! You will go right through. If you want to, we can stop a short time at the sheep ranch of this Mr. Bentley, and then we will go on. This is your opportunity to make a fortune, and you should not throw it over your shoulder."

Frank hesitated.

"I'll have to write my guardian all about it."

"Of course. He cannot object. Boy, I drink only when I am in town. If you will hitch to me I'll be your guardian. What do you say? If you are with me, give us your hand."

Frank thrust out his hand.

CHAPTER VI.

THE RECEPTION AT THE RANCH

Two horsemen had drawn up on the crest of a bare ridge and were looking toward a large, low ranch that lay at the base of a hill about a mile away.

Horses and riders showed signs of a long and weary journey. They were covered with dust, and the heads of the tired horses were drooping.

There was a great difference in the ages of the two travelers, for one was a man

nearly fifty, although he was straight and square shouldered, while the other was a beardless boy in his teens.

There was a look of relief and satisfaction on the faces of both, who were our friends Morgan and Frank Merriwell.

"There, boy," said the man, "that must be the ranch of Mark Bentley, and we have found it at last."

"But we have had no little trouble locating it," declared Frank. "I had begun to believe we had been directed wrong."

"I thought so myself. The buildings are sheltered so that a good view of them may be obtained only from the south, and that is why we failed to see them in the first place."

"I wonder how we shall be received?" speculated the lad. "Mr. Bentley has never seen me, but he was one of my father's schoolday chums."

"You needn't worry about our reception," declared Morgan. "If we were utter strangers we would be taken in and treated like honored guests. It's the way of the ranchers in this country. They never turn a stranger away."

"Well, then, let's lose no time in getting to the ranch, for I am about played out."

They rode forward. At their backs were slung repeating rifles, and their clothes, from their wide-brimmed hats to their boots, were made for service. Behind their saddles they carried small packs, which contained picks, shovels, pans, and cooking utensils, such as they absolutely required.

In the valley great herds of sheep were grazing. Near the low ranch were corrals and outbuildings. A stream flowed away to the south. To the west, in the blue distance, were mountains.

As they came nearer to the ranch they saw persons moving about, and a man came out to meet them. He was roughly

dressed, unshaved, and had the appearance of one used to outdoor life.

"Ho, strangers!" he cheerfully called "whither bound?"

"We are making for the ranch yonder about as fast as we can," answered Morgan. "Does Mark Bentley live there?"

"He does."

"Then we have struck the place we are looking for."

"Yes, this is Bentley's ranch," assured the man, "and I am Bentley. Can I do anything in particular for you?"

"Mr. Bentley," cried Frank, "I have come to see you, and I have taken the liberty to bring my friend, Mr. Morgan."

Bentley held out his hand and grasped Morgan's, giving it a hearty shake.

"I am glad to see you both," he declared. "We don't have many visitors here, but we welcome all who come. How are you, my boy? You say you have come to see me. Who are you?"

"I am Frank Merriwell."

"Frank Merriwell?"

"Yes, sir, Son of Charles Merriwell, with whom you were at school."

"Great Christopher! Is it possible? Why, I haven't heard from Charlie in twenty years! And you are his son? Remarkable! By jinks! you resemble him, now I look at you. Boy, I am more than glad to see you! Come right into the house, both of you. I'll have your critters taken care of. Come in, Frank Merriwell! I want you to tell me all about your father."

Bentley was delighted. His manner was rather rough, but it was most hospitable. He put his hands to his mouth and gave a call which brought a "black fellow" running around the house from the rear, and this fellow took the horses in charge.

Then Frank and Morgan followed the sheep raiser into the house, around which ran a broad veranda.

As Frank ascended the steps he caught

a glimpse of a pretty girl of eighteen, who slyly peeped forth at the visitors from behind the curtains of a window.

"Hello!" thought the boy. "I wonder if she is Mr. Bentley's daughter? She is rather good looking."

"Look here," said Bentley as soon as they were inside, "you want to get the dust off. Come upstairs. I'll show you where you can wash. Charlie Merriwell's boy! Well! well! well! How in the world do you happen to be in this part of the world? It is most remarkable!"

They followed him upstairs, and he showed them where they could wash. While they were doing so, he sat down astride a chair and shot a hundred questions at Frank. Before the boy had completed his toilet the sheepraiser had learned how it happened that the son of his old schoolmate was there, had found out that Charles Merriwell was somewhere out West in the United States, had learned that Asher Merriwell, Charles' brother, was dead, and had left his worldly possessions to Frank, and had satisfied his curiosity on fifty other points, at least.

"Say, this is a real pleasure!" he declared. "Charlie's boy! Why, it is almost as good as seeing Charlie himself! My house belongs to you and Mr. Morgan as long as you stay here! I haven't got anything good enough for you! And you must be hungry? Of course you are! I'll go down and order a square feed for you without delay."

Then they heard him go downstairs, muttering over and over:

"Charlie's boy! Well! well! well!"

"There," said Morgan, with a faint smile, "you can't make a fuss over this reception. It ought to suit you."

"Oh, I'm not kicking!" laughed Frank. "I didn't think he would be so pleased to see me."

In a few minutes Bentley returned and conducted them downstairs. He took

them into the parlor, which was tastily although not elaborately furnished. Everything seemed comfortable and homelike.

"It won't be long before supper will be ready," said Bentley. "I have directed that the fatted calf should be killed, to speak figuratively. I'll give you just as good a spread as I can, but you know we do not have all the delicacies here. We are too far from the markets. Sheep raising is not what it is cracked up to be. It's a hermit's life, but I am into it, and it's pretty hard getting out. Some day I mean to get out and go back to the United States, the greatest and grandest country on the face of the earth!"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Morgan. "I have never been in the United States, but I will not admit that it is ahead of Australia."

"That's because you have never been in the United States," smiled the rancher. "I have been in both countries, and you must acknowledge I've had the best opportunity to form a judgment."

"Oh, well, if the United States is such a wonderful country, what made you come to Australia, Mr. Bentley?"

"Easily answered, Mr. Morgan. I came to Australia when there were great opportunities for making fortunes here. I am pretty sure there were just as many opportunities in America, but it is natural for a man to overlook the things near him and go searching for something at a distance. That explains the whole matter, sir."

"Well, I presume you have succeeded pretty well here?"

"Yes, I'll confess that I have. I went into the sheep-raising business when there was far more money in it than there is to-day, and I haven't much to complain of, except that living on a sheep ranch has been, as I said, a hermit's life. I have been forced to send my daughter to Sydney to be educated and see something of

society. A man with children has no right to live in such a place as this, that is all."

This satisfied Frank that the girl he had seen was Mr. Bentley's daughter.

In about half an hour a bell rang, and Bentley announced that supper was ready, whereupon they arose and followed him to the dining room.

There they were introduced to Mrs. Bentley and to the rancher's daughter, who was, indeed, a very pretty and refined-appearing girl. Frank fancied there was a sadness in her face and eyes, as if she had experienced some deep sorrow, but this look was vague and shadowy.

A black girl waited on the table, and they sat down to a meal that delighted and satisfied the half-famished travelers.

CHAPTER VII.

THE KANACK.

After supper Bentley showed them about the ranch. As they passed around one of the corrals the sound of blows and cries of pain caused them to step quickly forward.

Frank was in advance, and he came upon a sight that aroused his warm blood in a moment.

A nearly naked black boy was writhing on the ground, while a large man lashed him fiercely with a raw-hide whip.

Like a flash the American youth sprang forward, and before he was aware of the presence of others, the white man felt his wrist caught and held.

"I wouldn't hit him again, if I were you," said the boy, in a cold, hard tone. "You have used him pretty rough already."

"Who the devil are you?" snarled the man with the whip. "What right have you to interfere with my business?"

"The right that any one has to prevent an act of cruelty."

The man with the whip glared, and the

black boy still writhed on the ground, his cries having changed to groans and sobs.

"Why, hang me!" grated the man, who did not observe Bentley and Morgan, as they were behind him, "I know my business, and I won't be interfered with!"

With a quick movement he wrenched his arm away, and again the whip rose in the air, for he was about to continue the brutal punishment of the black fellow.

But the blow did not fall.

Frank gave the man a thrust that sent him reeling.

"You shall not beat him any more!" resolutely declared the dauntless lad. "He has been punished too much already."

With a bitter curse, the man whirled and lifted the whip to strike Frank, but Mark Bentley rushed forward and interfered.

"Hold on, Jones!" cried the sheep raiser. "You must not hit him."

With difficulty the enraged man held his hand so that he saved himself from striking Bentley.

"Stand away!" he grated. "I'll leave a mark on his face!"

"I tell you that you must not hit him. Hold on!"

"He hit me."

"No, he simply gave you a push."

"That's enough."

"He is my guest. You have been drinking again, Jones."

"What right had that kid to interfere with my business?"

Here Morgan broke in.

"Right!" he exclaimed. "By lightning! any man that saw you cutting up the black fellow with that whip had a right. I'm not in love with Kanacks, but they're human, and they didn't come to this country of their own free will. Besides that, this one is no more'n a boy. If this youngster hadn't held ye up, I'd been likely to have jumped in and kicked the breath out of you, so you can set it down

that you got off easy, and thank the kid, as you called him."

Morgan was outspoken. When he thought a thing was right or wrong, he was pretty sure to express his opinion, and he appeared ready to back up whatever he said.

Bentley looked at his guests in mild amazement. He was inclined to think they were overstepping the bounds, but still they were his guests, and he wished to treat them with the utmost courtesy. At the same time, he felt like backing his foreman up, for the man with the whip was foreman of the ranch.

"This is not the first time Jones has had trouble with Gogo," he explained. "The Kanack is proud, and it takes considerable to break his spirit."

"I never saw much good in Kanacks," confessed Morgan; "but still, as I said before, they're human. I don't believe in beating a human being like he was a beast."

Jones spat fiercely on the ground and then turned on Bentley.

"Is this what I've got to stand?" he snarled. "If so, it is too much altogether! You must pay me off, and I will leave."

"No! no!" exclaimed the sheep raiser. "I can't afford to let you go now."

"And I can't afford to have my business interfered with by outsiders."

Bentley gave his guests a look of reproach, and then he drew Jones aside and talked to him in low tones.

The foreman seemed to remain obstinate and angry for a time, snarling his words and casting fierce glances at Frank.

The moment the rancher had drawn the foreman aside, the Kanack boy struggled to his feet. In several places the blood had started out from the cuts received from the whip.

Gogo stood a moment with downcast eyes, and then he gave Frank a glance of gratitude, which was followed by a look

of fear and hatred shot toward the foreman.

"Come here, my poor fellow," invited Frank. "Tell me what you had been doing that he was lashing you in such a manner."

"Me doing nothing," was the reply as the boy lifted his head a bit haughtily. "He kick me—tell me to move quick. I tell him he have no right to kick me and spit on me, as he do often. Then he git mad and whip me."

"Well, why don't you leave here? What makes you stay and work under such a master?"

"Leave?" whispered the boy, glancing fearfully toward the spot where Bentley and Jones were standing. "Where I go?"

"Where you came from when you came here."

The black boy wrung his hands and his chin quivered.

"How I go?" he asked. "I can't git to sea. If I did git to sea, I got no boat to sail in."

"Boat? What do you want of a boat?"

"To go back home."

"He's a Kanack, Frank," said Morgan, as if that explained everything.

"A Kanack?"

"Yes."

"Well, what is a Kanack?"

"Don't you know?"

"No."

"Why, he's a South Sea Islander."

"Not a native of this country?"

"No."

"Well, that is surprising information for me."

"You have heard about the Chinese coolie trade?"

"Yes."

"Then you know how thousands of the poor Chinamen once were carried into captivity under pretense that it was a legal business transaction—that the Chinamen had bound themselves out for

a term of years. You also know that they generally became slaves for the rest of their lives, and that the nefarious business went so far that vessels were fitted out to capture Chinamen by hundreds and carry them into forced captivity."

"I have heard of these things."

"Well, the Kanack trade is the same thing. All over Australia are Kanacks who have been brought here from the Sandwich Islands and elsewhere. Not one out of ten came of their own free will. All have been told that they would be taken back home after a term of years, but not one in a thousand ever gets back. Once here they have to stay. Every black fellow brought here in that way is called a Kanack."

Frank's face bore an expression of horror and disgust.

"Why, it is slavery!" he exclaimed.

"The slave trade in the United States before the war was not worse!"

Morgan nodded.

"That's just what it is," he acknowledged. "If a Kanack runs away he is hunted down with bloodhounds. They never escape."

"And is this the country of which you boast so much?"

"Oh, well, you see, it is not known that the Kanack trade is still carried on. It was supposed to be stopped some years ago, and it *was* checked."

"Well, this is a most remarkable country where such business may be carried on after it is supposed to be stopped."

"There'll not be much more of it."

"I should hope not."

Gogo now got hold of Frank's hand, and thanked the boy over and over for interfering and saving him from the terrible punishment he was receiving.

"I no forget," he said.

Then Jones was seen to leave Bentley and stride angrily away, giving Frank a deadly look.

"You'll have to keep your eyes open

for that fellow, boy," warned Morgan. "By lightning! he looked as if he'd like to eat you."

Bentley approached them, wearing a troubled look.

"I'm sorry this occurred," he said.

"Jones is the best foreman I ever had. He knows the sheep-raising business from start to finish."

"I, too, am sincerely sorry anything of the kind took place," frankly acknowledged Merriwell. "But you can't blame me."

"I suppose not," came rather doubtfully from Bentley.

"Why, how can you?" impulsively cried the American lad. "He was beating this black boy in a most brutal manner, and it was my duty to interfere."

"I shall have to differ with you a trifle," faintly smiled the sheep raiser. "It was my place to interfere, if any one did; but your action was impulsive and thoughtless, so I did not blame you."

This way of putting it scarcely satisfied Frank, but he remained silent.

Mr. Bentley turned to Gogo, saying, sternly:

"Go on about your business, you rascal, and don't make it necessary for Jones to use the whip on you again."

Without a word, but with a look that spoke distinctly, the Kanack turned and moved away.

"I don't know whether Jones will leave me or not," said Bentley. "He was ready to do so, but I reasoned with him a little, and he seemed to change his mind."

"I shall be very sorry if you lose your foreman over this unfortunate affair, Mr. Bentley," declared Frank.

The sheep raiser's face cleared, and he dropped a hand on the boy's shoulder, laughing as he said:

"You don't know how much you remind me of your father. He was an impulsive, fearless fellow, always ready to jump into any sort of danger and fight

for what he considered right. Don't let this affair worry you, my lad."

Then the two men and the boy strolled on together.

CHAPTER VIII.

RUDOLPH REYNOLDS.

From the veranda where he was sitting Frank saw a horseman come over a distant rise and bear down on the ranch. The fellow rode with reckless ease, and there was something dashing in his appearance, even at a distance. About his neck was kotted a scarlet handkerchief, and the last rays of the setting sun glittered on the silver mountings of his rifle, saddle, stirrups, and spurs.

The horse which he rode was coal black and spirited. The eyes of the boy on the veranda shone as he watched the movements of the handsome animal.

"A creature worth owning!" muttered Frank.

Suddenly the horseman swerved aside and made toward one of the stables. Still watching, Frank saw Jones, the foreman, come out and meet the stranger.

The horseman flung his animal on its haunches, leaped to the ground, and grasped Jones' hand.

"Those men are decidedly friendly," thought the boy.

Leading his horse, the newcomer followed Jones, disappearing from view.

Frank waited a little, and then, feeling somewhat uneasy, he started to stroll about.

Behind the stable he saw Jones and the stranger standing, engaged in earnest conversation. From their manner, it was plain they did not care to be overheard.

"I'll wager something that they are both rascals," thought Frank. "If they are not plotting deviltry at this moment, I am greatly mistaken. I'd give something to know just what sort of a scheme they are discussing."

He turned and walked back to the veranda.

The sun went down, and the stranger came whistling around the corner. He had a curling black mustache, and wore his wide-brimmed hat canted over his left ear. He was handsome in a way, but the boy instantly decided that his face was not that of a man who could be trusted. He looked as if he would consider his "word of honor" of little consequence.

The man regarded Frank keenly with his black eyes.

"Hello, you!" he said, familiarly. "You've got a nerve!"

Frank flushed, but remained cool.

"Have I?" he said, quietly. "I might return the compliment."

"Don't doubt it," was the cheerful acknowledgment. "But you're a mere kid. And Jones says you braced up to him like a rooster. Why, he can eat you!"

"There are various opinions about that."

"Well, I don't know. There can't be any doubt about it. If I'd been in Jones' place, I'd spanked you."

That was too much. Frank arose to his feet.

"Just imagine yourself in Jones' place," he urged. "You seem to be looking for trouble."

The man laughed and snapped his fingers.

"Jones says you're visiting here. So am I. Can't afford to offend Bentley. He's got a daughter, you know. Deucedly pretty girl."

Somehow the fellow's manner was insulting and insolent in the extreme, and Frank grew angrier still.

"If you wish to administer that spanking, we'll just step out of sight behind some of the buildings, and Mr. Bentley will know nothing about it," he said.

"Whew!" whistled the man, following with a laugh. "You act as if you are in earnest."

"I am."

"Why, I actually believe you think you'd be a match for me!"

"I don't know about that. You might run up against a surprise."

"Kid, you have the swelled head, and you've got it bad. You ought to see a doctor."

Never had Frank met a person who aggravated him as did this man.

"You may not have the swelled head," returned the boy, "but you have the face of a first-class rascal."

"Is that so?" laughed the man. "Well, you surprise me!"

"You are likely to be surprised still more."

"Really! But, say, I trust you will excuse me. I'll see you again. Just now I must go in and see Miss Bentley."

The man would have passed into the house, but Frank stepped before him.

"Wait a moment," urged the boy.

The sneering smile disappeared from the stranger's face, and a dangerous look leaped into his eyes.

"What now?" he sharply asked.

"I have something more to say."

"Be in a hurry about it. I have little time to waste with kids."

"Will you tell me your name?"

"With pleasure. It is Rudolph Reynolds."

"Mine is Frank Merriwell. I don't like you."

"Glad to hear it. I don't care to be troubled with children. They annoy me."

Frank bit his lip. The color had left his face, and he longed to strike those sneering lips.

"If you remain here long, Mr. Rudolph Reynolds," said the boy, with forced calmness, "I may annoy you still more. I believe you are a snake. Snakes are dangerous. They should be stepped on."

"But you must always look out that

they do not bite you when you try to step on them."

They stood looking straight into each other's eyes. In a few minutes they had grown to dislike each other most heartily.

"Have you anything more to say?" demanded Reynolds.

"Not now."

"Stand aside."

Frank hesitated, and then stepped aside, permitting the man to enter the house.

When Reynolds was gone, Frank paced the veranda. He wondered that he had allowed himself to be so aroused, and yet, whenever he thought of the man's insulting words and looks, he could scarce restrain himself.

"I am sure he is a rascal, and I believe he is dangerous," thought Frank. "There is bound to be trouble between us."

CHAPTER IX.

GOGO BETRAYS A SECRET.

Frank soon found that Reynolds was something of a "privileged character" at the Bentley ranch. The dashing fellow made himself perfectly at home, as if he was the owner of the ranch, and Mark Bentley seemed to accept it as a matter of course.

Observing this, Frank decided that Reynolds must be a particular friend of the rancher, and this caused the boy to decide that he would avoid trouble with him if possible.

Frank felt that he had made trouble enough since coming to the ranch, and so he would keep away from Reynolds.

Morgan was strangely quiet. The fortune hunter kept in the background much of the time, smoking and wandering about by himself.

Frank observed that Reynolds lost little time in seeking Miss Bentley, and he lingered near her.

"Great Scott!" muttered the boy. "That fellow is her lover, and he is a first-class villain, if I ever saw one!"

The boy instantly decided that Miss Bentley was in serious danger; but he knew, if she were in love with Reynolds, it would be no easy thing to open her eyes to her peril.

"If I bother around there, the chances are that I will get myself thoroughly disliked, and that is all the good it will do. A girl in love is worse than a crazy blind man. She can't see into what danger she may be rushing."

Frank fully realized that he had no evidence against Reynolds. He had nothing against the man, save that he had conceived a violent dislike for him at first sight.

As he remained outside when Reynolds first arrived, he heard the man laughing and talking with Vauna Bentley in the parlor. Later he heard Reynolds singing a sentimental song, accompanied by the music of a guitar.

Mr. Bentley, who had received his latest visitor most cordially, came out and smoked on the veranda, watching the rising moon.

Frank, who had strolled away from the house, came back after a time, and found the sheep raiser there.

They fell to chatting.

The boy told Mr. Bentley much about his travels, but did not tell anything that was not called for by the man, who seemed greatly interested in the son of his former schoolmate.

All this talk led up to some things which Frank wished to know, and the boy finally began to ask questions himself.

"Just who is this man who arrived here since Morgan and I came?"

"He is Rudolph Reynolds."

"Yes, I know his name, but what is his business?"

"His business? Oh, he is a speculator."

"In what?"

"Sheep, wool, cattle—almost anything."

"I infer that you know him very well?"

"Quite well."

"If it will not be asking too much, how long have you known him?"

"Three years or more."

"Done much business with him?"

"Some."

Plainly Bentley was wondering why the boy was asking all these questions.

"I presume he is a good man to deal with?"

"He has seemed so."

"Does he call here often?"

"Oh, he comes around at irregular times. Sometimes he is here for a day or two every month. Then, again, he will not show up for two or three months."

Frank whistled a little to himself and thought over these answers. Something made him believe that Mark Bentley knew very little about Rudolph Reynolds. He longed to ask farther questions, but felt that he must be regarded as impertinent if he did so, and he refrained.

However, Mr. Bentley volunteered some information concerning Reynolds.

"He is a lucky fellow," declared the rancher. "Makes money on whatever he takes hold of—always has plenty of money. He seems to be in business entirely for himself, as I have never been able to learn that he was connected with a concern anywhere. He takes delight in open-air life. You should see him shoot. He is one of the greatest rifle and pistol shots I ever saw. He is a perfect horseman and is always in the best of spirits. His good spirits have made him welcome here at all times. He usually brings us some information about the outside world, and he has been able to cheer up Vauna when she was downcast."

Frank wondered if Reynolds and Vauna were lovers, and Bentley was blind enough not to discern the fact.

After a while the rancher went back into the house, and Frank strolled out into the moonlight once more.

The boy had not gone far before a dark figure suddenly arose from the ground near at hand.

In a twinkling the boy's hand fell on the butt of a revolver, and he sharply said:

"Steady, there! Who are you?"

"Me Gogo," was the reply, and he recognized the voice of the Kanack.

"What do you want, Gogo?"

"Um want to see you."
 "All right. Look at me."
 "Want to tell you something."
 "Drive away. I am listening."
 The black boy edged a little nearer, and then he huskily whispered:
 "Ole Jone he is bad man."
 "I don't doubt it, Gogo."
 "Him hate you 'cause you didn't let him lick me."
 "Let him hate."
 "You mus' look out sharp for him. Him be after you."
 "After me?"
 "Yes. Him mad enough to kill you. Heard him say so."
 "You did hear him say so?"
 "Yes."
 "When?"
 "When that odor bad man come this afternoon."
 "What other bad man?"
 "Reynol'."
 "Why do you call him a bad man? What do you know about him?"
 "Him trade in Kanacks. Him bring Gogo here."
 "Really! So that is a part of his business?"
 "Yes."
 "Mr. Bentley did not tell me that," thought Frank. "I fancy that trading in Kanacks is not the most honorable business a man can engage in."
 "So you heard Jones tell Reynolds that he was mad enough to kill me?"
 "Yes. Hear him say he do it if he git good chance."
 "Well, I shall look out for Mr. Jones, and I am much obliged to you, Gogo. Now, I want you to tell me something about Reynolds."
 "Tell all I can."
 "Is he the lover of Miss Bentley?"
 "No! no! She no care for him. He care for her pritty much, but she no care for him."
 "Well, that is a sure sign that she's well balanced."
 "I tell you something—you never tell."
 "Of course I will not tell. Go ahead, Gogo."
 "If you tell, Gogo git worst licking of his life."
 "Don't let it worry you. I'll keep silent."

"Miss Ben'ley have a lover, but what you think him be?"
 "I haven't the least idea."
 The Kanack came close to Frank and cautiously whispered:
 "Him be brack?"
 "Black?" gasped the American lad in astonishment.
 "Yes. 'Sh! 'sh! Oh, they kill me if they know I tell."
 "Why, it is impossible. I can't understand it. She seems like a refined and educated young lady."
 "I tell you truth. Dat fellow be brack, but he no Kanack. He native. Ben'ley he take him an' try to make him like white man. Make him so him read books, dress up, act jes' like white man. Ben'ley take him when him be small boy, an' him grow up in house with Miss Ben'ley. That way they come to love."
 Frank Merriwell whistled.
 "But where is this fellow now?"
 "Wangalee him run 'way."
 "Run away?"
 "Yes."
 "What for?"
 "Some of him people come 'long. Him can't help it—have to go, same as Gogo want to go back to him people."
 "Do you mean to say that this black fellow gave up the comforts of civilization and the white girl he loved to go away with his wretched people?"
 "That so," firmly declared the Kanack.
 "Well, I can't understand that!"
 "You can't? That easy. What Wangalee care for way white man live? That not way his people live. What him care 'bout books? Him people no read books. What him care for clothes? Him people no wear clothes. They no live in houses, same as white man. It be not right for him to try to live like white man. All the time when they learn him to live that way he feel inside somewhere that it be not right for him. Bimeby pritty soon 'long come his people. Then what he feel inside is one great big want to go 'way with 'em—live like 'em. He have to give up all him have here, an' have to leave girl; but him can't stop that what he feel in him breast. That feel be so strong it make him run 'way."
 "I think I understand," said Frank, slowly. "Nature and natural inclinations

asserted themselves, and he was powerless to resist. He gave up everything here and fled back to the life that his people lived. By Jove! what a strange romance!"

CHAPTER X.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

That night Frank dreamed of Miss Bentley and Wangalee. Their strange romance had impressed him so much that he thought of it until he fell asleep, and then he dreamed about it.

Some time in the night he awoke. The moon was high in the heavens, and as he looked from the open window all the world seemed sleeping. Morgan breathed heavily and regularly on the bed.

Away out across the plain sounded a strange cry. It was answered by a similar cry from near the farther corrals.

"Whatever can that mean?" speculated the listening boy. "Somehow it did not seem that those cries came from the throats of beasts."

He remained at the window, listening for the cry to be repeated.

In this he was disappointed, but he was certain he heard the hoofbeats of horses coming nearer and nearer. The horses seemed to be behind the house, out of his range of vision.

"Well, I am bound to know something more about this," muttered Frank as he hastily slipped on his clothes.

He looked to his revolvers, and then stepped lightly out through the open window upon the sloping roof of the veranda.

The eaves of the veranda were about nine feet from the ground. He swung himself over and slid down one of the posts.

"I'll find some way to get back," he thought.

Then he passed round the house, hugging close to the walls, and thus keeping in the shadow.

He paused to listen, but no longer could he hear the sound of horses' feet.

"Still I am sure I did not imagine it," he muttered.

The nearest one of the outbuildings

was some distance away, and a broad strip of clear moonlight lay between.

"I'll have to chance it," decided the dauntless lad.

Like a rabbit he ran across the lighted space, his feet seeming to make no noise on the ground.

Frank crouched in the shadow of the stable, listening and peering about him. There he remained for two or three minutes, when he became satisfied that he had not been seen.

Around the stable he slipped, and then he found a line of other buildings and corrals, so that he was able to keep in the shadow nearly all the time.

The boy moved with caution, for he knew there was danger of coming suddenly upon some one by whom he did not care to be seen. He seemed to feel the danger in his bones.

At last he fancied he could hear the murmur of voices near one of the sheep pens. He had taken the utmost care not to frighten the sheep, for he knew their scampering might betray him.

Then he observed that within that sheep pen the creatures were moving restlessly about. Evidently they had been alarmed already.

Frank lay flat on the ground and wormed his way forward little by little. This he did with the skill of an Indian creeping upon a deadly foe.

In the course of ten minutes he reached a point where he could distinctly hear voices in guarded conversation.

Three minutes later he was peering at four men who were talking in low tones, as if they did not wish to be overheard.

Near the four men were two saddled horses.

Two of those men Frank Merriwell quickly recognized.

They were John Jones, the foreman, and Rudolph Reynolds, the speculator and Kanack trader.

But who were the others?

Frank asked himself the question.

That those four men were met there for no good purpose the boy was confident. That they were all rascals of the blackest dye he had not a doubt.

And then, as he listened, he was certain he had heard the voices of the two

men who were talking with Jones and Reynolds.

Those voices sounded familiar.

With a revolver grasped in his fingers, Frank lay there, trying to overhear what was being said. This he soon found was impossible, for although he could catch a word or two occasionally, the men were speaking guardedly, and he could make no sense of what they were saying.

Frank longed to get nearer, but he saw that such a thing would be impossible unless he ran the risk of being detected as soon as he tried to advance.

"Well," he thought, "I'll be sure of one thing: Reynolds and Jones are plotting some kind of wickedness."

He remained there, watching and listening, and he finally was rewarded for his patience.

One of the two men with Jones and Reynolds thrust back his broad-brimmed hat, and the moonlight fell full upon his face.

Frank came near uttering a cry of the most profound astonishment.

The man he had seen in the low grogery of "the Rocks," in Sydney!

It was the fellow known as Bill!

Then the astonished boy looked sharply at the other man, and he saw it was Jack, Bill's partner in the attempt to rob Morgan of his belt of gold.

It took some little time for Frank to recover from his surprise, and then he began to speculate on the probable cause of the presence of those two rascals.

The more he considered the matter the firmer became his conviction that those men had followed Morgan from Sydney to Bentley's ranch.

Just how this had been accomplished Frank could not tell, but the men were there, and something besides chance had brought them to that spot.

It did not take Frank long to arrive at the belief that Bill and Jack were tracking Morgan, with the hope that he would lead them to the place where he found the gold.

"By Jove!" thought the boy. "They must have skill as trailers, and it looks as if they would succeed if something is not done to throw them off the trail."

Now that he had seen these men, he

was certain he had distinctly heard the word "gold" spoken several times by the delectable quartette.

In the course of ten or fifteen minutes Jack and Bill mounted their horses, bade Jones and Reynolds good-by, and rode away.

Frank lay in the shadow close to the corral, and he saw the foreman and speculator turn and come directly toward him.

"Here's where we have a scrimmage!" mentally decided the boy.

He hugged the ground and pressed his body against the corral.

Reynolds was talking as they advanced.

"I tell you to go slow, Jones," he was saying. "What's the use to do up the boy when it may spoil everything? The youngster is Morgan's partner, that's plain, and Morgan is taking him back to the place where the gold was found. If the boy was killed, Morgan might take a fancy not to go there, and that would ruin everything."

"All right," growled the foreman in a surly manner. "I'll let the youngster alone for a little time—that is, if he keeps out of my way. But I mean to finish him some time."

The men passed so near the boy that Jones' foot almost touched Frank's elbow, but the lad remained perfectly motionless, and he was not seen.

When they had gone on and disappeared, Frank sat up.

"Well, I must say that I have found out something of importance to-night!" he muttered. "Morgan will be a trifle surprised when I tell him."

After a time he made his way back to the house, climbed up to the roof of the veranda by aid of a brace that took the place of a bracket on one of the corner posts, re-entered the house by the window, took off his shoes, and aroused Morgan.

When the boy had told the gold hunter just what he had seen and learned, Morgan was fully awakened.

"By lightning! this is interesting!" he admitted as he found his pipe and lighted it. "I'll have to think it over a little."

Frank lay down on the bed and watched

the man, who was smoking and thinking. When Frank fell asleep, Morgan was still smoking and thinking.

In the morning Morgan said:

"Perhaps we will fool those fellows, boy. We'll settle down here and stop a while. They'll be tired of watching us after a while."

So Morgan and Frank seemed to settle down at Bentley's ranch as if their only object in life was to visit the rancher.

Frank rode much with Bentley to look about the place, and two days passed in this manner.

Morgan seemed the most contented gold seeker any one could imagine. Apparently he had no farther care than to smoke and take life easy.

Reynolds was restless. Each day he rode away and was gone more than three hours.

While Reynolds was away Frank improved such opportunities as he obtained to become better acquainted with Miss Bentley.

He found her well educated, refined, and pretty, a good talker, and something more than an ordinary musician and singer. Mark Bentley had obtained a piano for his daughter, and had it brought to his ranch at great expense, but Vauna preferred the guitar.

It was the second evening after Frank's discovery, just related, that Frank and Vauna were sitting alone on the veranda, the moon having risen in the east.

They had been talking of many things, and at last Frank asked Vauna to sing. She picked up the guitar, put it in tune, played softly a few moments, and then sang a pathetic little love song, the chorus of which ran:

"Oh, the days that are vanished forever—
The sweet, sunny days of the past!
They will come again back to us never,
They were happy—too happy to last."

Frank felt that she was thinking of the happy days she had known in the past, and the infinite tenderness and sweetness of her voice thrilled him deeply.

As the song ended there was a rather scornful laugh, and Rudolph Reynolds appeared.

"Very sentimental," he observed; "but why should you waste so much sweetness

on a kid, Vauna? Are there not enough men to be found who are ready to throw themselves at your feet?"

"There are men, but I do not care to have any one throw himself at my feet, Mr. Reynolds," said the girl rather haughtily as she arose and entered the house.

The trader whirled and clutched Frank by the collar.

"Keep away from her!" he grated. "If you want to live, keep away from her!"

The demon of jealous hatred glinted from his eyes, and his voice was not steady.

"Take your hand from my shoulder!" commanded the boy.

They stood there, face to face, eye to eye.

"Take your hand from my shoulder!"

Reynolds' hand fell away, not a little to his own astonishment. He was surprised that he should obey the boy, but a will other than his own seemed to force him to do so.

"Curse you!" he hoarsely whispered. "Some day I will fix you so there will be no farther fear that you will trouble me!"

"Better leave that to your friend Jones—or to Jack or Bill," said the boy as he turned away.

"Jack—Bill! What do you mean? What—"

But Frank walked on and entered the house without turning his head or paying the slightest attention to the angry and astonished speculator.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CONVICT.

Frank was sorry to think he had spoken almost as soon as he had said anything about Jack and Bill, but it was too late to recall his words.

He knew that he had placed Reynolds on his guard.

The following morning Mark Bentley came to Frank, showing agitation in his manner.

"Look here, my boy," he said, "what do you know about this Morgan?"

Frank was surprised.

"What do I know about him?" he repeated. "Not much."

"You have not known him long?"

"No."

"You know nothing of his past?"

"Nothing."

"He is a chance acquaintance?"

"I had the good fortune to protect him from a band of robbers in Sydney, and we became friends. He had a belt filled with gold dust about his waist, and the robbers were trying to get it."

"Where did he say he obtained the gold?"

"Among the Blue Mountains, for which we are bound."

"Frank, I want to give you some advice. You must heed it."

"Go ahead."

"Have nothing more to do with this Morgan."

"Why not, sir? You must have a good reason for giving such advice."

"I have."

"What is your reason, sir?"

"Did you ever hear of Brown Bob?"

"No, sir."

"Well, Brown Bob was originally a convict sent here from England. He was a desperate character. One night he murdered his keeper and escaped. He was never recaptured."

"Well, sir?"

"He is living to-day."

"Yes?"

"And he has become the leader of the most notorious gang of ruffians that ever cursed this country. They have robbed and murdered hundreds of people."

"Well, I fail to see what this has to do with Morgan."

"Morgan is Brown Bob!"

Frank Merriwell had been shrewd enough to see what was coming, and he did not betray any wonder. Instead, he simply asked:

"How do you know this?"

"I have received absolute proof of it, my boy."

"What sort of proof?"

"Proof that cannot be controverted."

"Now, look here, Mr. Bentley. I may be entirely deceived in Morgan, but I believe he is all right. I know he has enemies, and they have been working against

him. I shall not believe him a criminal and an outlaw till I receive absolute proof of it."

"The right name of Brown Bob is Robert Hawkins. If you wish to be satisfied, ask Morgan if he ever heard of Rob Hawkins. Ask him if that is not his name."

"I will! I'll look for him now—at once—and ask him."

Frank proceeded to hunt up Morgan, and found him smoking.

Without hesitation or delay, the boy put the question to the man:

"Did you ever hear of Robert Hawkins?"

The pipe fell from Morgan's teeth, and he whirled like a panther, his hand going into his bosom. There was a sudden dangerous glare in his eyes, and he snarled:

"Eh? What's that?"

Frank repeated the question.

"Hear of Rob Hawkins? Why, of course I have."

Morgan spoke slowly, seeming to make an effort to recover from the agitation that had overtaken him when the question was put.

"Was he a convict?"

"Yes."

"Did you know him?"

"Yes."

Morgan did not hesitate about replying, but his voice was harsh and unsteady, and he still seemed to fear an attack.

Frank was astonished by the man's manner and his ready confessions. The boy faltered, and then he resolutely demanded:

"Are you Rob Hawkins?"

"I see somebody has told you everything," said Morgan, slowly and somewhat sadly. "The curse has followed me! I did hope to escape it for a time. I see it is impossible for me to do so. Never mind. I'll go on living the same old life. I'll go back to it again! I was a fool to think I could get away from it! I don't blame you, my boy. You are all right. It was an accident that threw us together in the first place, and it seemed so good to have one person in the world who treated me as if I were an honest man!"

Frank Merriwell's astonishment grew.

Morgan had seemed so dauntless and lionlike that it dazed the boy to see him show such agitation and to hear him speak in a voice that trembled and broke.

All the swagger had gone out of the man's manner, and he seemed bowed and crushed. Slowly he picked up the pipe and placed it in his pocket.

"I'll go on," he muttered, seeming to forget Frank and speak to himself—"I'll go on alone. The mountains will hide me again, and I'll become a hermit once more. It will be five years more before I come out to the world, and I may be so old then that no one will know me. It is fate!"

Without another word he turned away. His feet clumped as he walked, and the elasticity had gone out of his step. He seemed to have taken on ten years' age in a minute.

A feeling of pity bubbled up in the heart of the boy. Surely this man could not be so black as he was painted. And still he had confessed.

Frank opened his lips to call to Morgan, but the man went on and the boy did not call.

Twenty minutes later, the self-confessed convict was riding away from Bentley's ranch—alone.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CRY IN THE NIGHT.

An hour after Morgan's departure Frank, who was wandering restlessly about, came upon Reynolds and Jones. The speculator and the foreman were talking together privately, and Frank heard the former say:

"The scheme worked. I'll take the trail of Morgan right away, and you are to watch the boy. We succeeded in splitting them all right, and they must be kept apart."

"They'll be kept apart forever if I get a good chance at that kid!" growled Jones. "I'll finish him!"

"Be careful!"

"Don't worry about me. My record is good."

Frank backed away.

"So it was a plot to separate us," he thought as soon as he had retreated so

there was no danger of discovery. "And it worked all right. We have played right into the hands of these rascals. And Reynolds will follow Morgan, while Jones keeps track of me. Is there a chance of overtaking Morgan now? I'll make a move they are not looking for."

He lost no time in finding his horse and saddling the animal. As soon as he could get ready he was off, and he was not discovered until a long distance from the ranch. He had not said farewell to any one.

Frank was able to follow Morgan's trail into the mountains, but for all that he urged his horse to the utmost, he did not overtake the man before nightfall.

In the meantime he discovered that he was followed.

He had expected that Reynolds and Jones would come after him hot foot, but had anticipated overtaking Morgan before they could come up with him.

He was disappointed in overtaking the strange man, although he traced him into the foothills before nightfall.

Near sunset, from the crest of a ridge, he looked back toward Bentley's ranch.

Three men were following on his trail. At that distance he found it difficult to make them out, but he became satisfied that Reynolds was not with them.

"If he is not there, they must be Jones, together with the two ruffians from Sydney, Jack and Bill."

This he felt sure was the truth, and he knew his trailers were decidedly dangerous. There was not one of the trio who would hesitate to cut a throat for money, and Jones was Frank's deadly foe.

"He'd do the job for revenge," Merriwell muttered. "I must look out for John Jones."

Onward he went. When night came down he had paused beside a clear spring, and he satisfied his hunger by some smoked beef and hard bread, a portion of the supplies originally carried by himself and Morgan.

After taking a long drink from the spring and watering his horse, he pushed forward slowly till he found a spot where he felt that he could camp without danger of being discovered.

Removing the saddle and blanket, the boy picketed his horse and then lay down to sleep. He lay with his ear close to the ground, and he felt certain that the approach of horses would awaken him.

Frank slept with his hand on a ready revolver.

For all of his strange position, he slumbered soundly.

The moon was high in the sky when he awoke, but, as he had planned, his horse and himself were in the deep shadow of the hills.

He listened, but seemed to hear nothing.

"Strange that I awoke in this manner if there was nothing to arouse me," he thought.

He continued to listen, and a feeling of restlessness grew upon him, so that he finally sat up.

The horse, which had been grazing near at hand, seemed to be listening also, with its head high in the air and its ears pricked forward.

"What is it, pony?" asked Frank in a low tone. "Is there something in the wind?"

The horse snorted, as if alarmed, and that brought the boy to his feet.

"I know something is wrong," he muttered. "I am at a loss how to locate it. Are my enemies creeping upon me?"

The thought that his foes might be lurking in the dark shadows of the great boulders made him shiver. Then he crouched to the ground, grasped his rifle, and rested it across his knee, ready to use it in a moment if necessary.

With searching eyes he peered into the shadows on every hand, more than half expecting to see a red tongue of fire leap out, hear the report of a rifle and the whistle of a bullet.

Nowhere could he see anything stirring, but there were shadows amid the rocks that resembled crouching human beings.

After some time he became satisfied that no one was near.

"Still I feel that I was aroused by something," he muttered.

A desire to look down into the valley below took possession of him. Keeping in the shadows as far as possible, he made

his way to a point from which he could peer down into the valley that led deeper into the mountains.

Barely had he obtained a position where he could look into the valley, when there was a clatter of hoofs, and two horsemen raced across a strip of moonlight, disappearing into the deeper shadows far up the valley.

The horseman in advance carried a huge bundle in his arms.

"I believe he was Reynolds!" muttered the boy up amid the rocks. "Who was with him? What was that he carried in his arms?"

He listened. The horsemen were far away, and the hoofbeats of the horses grew fainter and fainter.

And then, through the still night air, came a long shrill cry that sounded like an appeal for aid.

The sound of that cry struck a chill to Frank Merriwell's heart.

"It did not seem like an animal," he muttered. "And still it must have been. It was surely a wail of distress."

He returned to the place where his horse was picketed, but his slumber for the remainder of the night was fitful and broken. In his dreams he seemed to hear that cry repeated over and over again, and he awoke a score of times, his rifle grasped in his hand, ready to defend himself.

CHAPTER XHI.

THE DEATH SHOT.

With the first signs of day Frank was astir. He was still troubled by the recollection of the weird cry he had heard in the night.

Eating a hasty breakfast, he made his way down into the valley and mounted his horse. Then he rode onward into the mountains.

Frank began to feel that his quest for Morgan was a waste of time, and still he did not wish to give it up. He felt that it was his duty to warn the man of danger if possible, and he longed to have a talk with the one who had so readily confessed that he was a one-time convict.

He did not fear Morgan, even if it were true that the man had been known as

Brown Bob. But now he remembered that he had not charged the gold hunter with being the notorious outlaw.

"That was where I made a mistake. I do not believe he is Brown Bob; I believe he would have denied that."

Frank kept on into the mountains till near the middle of the day, when he discovered that his course was blocked and he could advance no farther.

This discovery convinced him that he was entirely off the trail, and, quite disheartened, he turned back.

"I'll go back to Bentley's," he decided.

During the middle of the day, having found water and a place where his horse could feed, he gave himself and the animal a long rest, of which both stood in need.

Night came down before he was fairly out of the mountains.

Before the moon rose he detected a glimmer of light low down on the plain, and he made toward it, wondering what it could be.

After a time he reached a point where he found himself looking down toward an encampment, in the midst of which a camp fire glimmered. He could see two covered wagons within the light of the fire, and he discerned moving figures.

Dismounting, Frank led his horse down toward the camp.

They were quite near when the animal suddenly neighed.

The neighing of the horse produced a commotion in the camp, and Frank saw some black fellows running about in an excited manner.

"Oh-ho the camp!" he immediately called.

"Oh-ho!" came back the answer. "Who are you?"

"A traveler."

"Where goin'?"

"To Bentley's ranch."

"We're bound there. Come on."

He advanced slowly, seeing a number of black men ranged to receive him. Some of them were armed, but as he came nearer he saw their weapons were old fashioned and of little value.

In vain he looked about for a single white man. There was not one in the camp.

One of the black fellows, who seemed to be a leader among them, came forward to meet Frank.

"Welcome!" he said, extending his hand.

Frank took the offered hand, and the firelight showed him that before him was a young native who had a decidedly intelligent face.

"You say you are going to Bentley's ranch?" questioned this native.

"Yes; and you say you are bound there?"

"We are. We are shearers."

"Shearers?"

"Yes, sheep shearers. I am the boss and these are my men. We go from ranch to ranch and shear sheep. The white men have done so and made money, now we black fellows are going to try it. We have done well so far. My men are all right and can work if they do not get rum. If they get rum they are no good."

There was something honest and straightforward about the young fellow, who was dressed somewhat better than the others, and Frank immediately took a liking to him.

"How does it happen you are going to Bentley's?" asked the boss of the shearers.

"I have been stopping there, but went into the mountains on business," Frank explained.

"You have been stopping there?" cried the black youth, eagerly.

"Yes."

"All well there?"

"Yes."

Frank was struck by a sudden suspicion.

"My name is Frank Merriwell," he said. "What is yours?"

"I am called Dick Williams now," was the reply. "One time my name was Wangalee."

"I thought so!"

"You thought so? What do you know? Did you ever hear of me?"

"Yes."

"At Bentley's?"

"Yes."

"Not from Vauna—Miss Bentley?"

"No."

Wangalee seemed disappointed, still he said:

"I thought it could not be from her, and I am sure it was not from her father."

"You are right."

The boss of the sheep shearers was eager to hear all about Miss Bentley. He invited Frank to come and sit by the fire, while one of the black fellows cared for the horse.

Noticing the boy's hesitation, Wangalee proudly said:

"You need have no fear. None of your things will be stolen. If my men would steal, they cannot afford to do so. If a white man steals, it may be forgotten; if a black man steals, it is never forgotten, and any one has the right to kill him. The white man will drive the black man out, and all the land will belong to the whites. I see that it will come some time. I have told my people that they must try to live like the white man. It is hard to make them see that it is so. These who are with me know it."

A short time later Frank was seated by the fire, chatting with Wangalee, whose questions he answered.

Frank found the black fellow was indeed well educated and highly intelligent, being a great contrast to the average native. And Wangalee was rather good looking, being finely formed.

"It will never be possible for all my people to live like the white man," Wangalee declared after they had talked a while. "They have their way of living, and there is something about the life that holds them, wretched though it is. I have tried the white man's life. Mr. Bentley was kind to me. But when some of my people came along, I could not resist the desire to run away with them. I did run away, and for months I have lived with my people in their wretched huts, naked, lazy—a savage, for that is what they call us. Then my pride awoke again, and I ran away from my people. I was one of Mr. Bentley's shearers, and I went about earning my living by shearing sheep. I found others of my people who were doing so. They had white men for bosses, and the white men were getting all the money they earned. I took them away from the white men, and now they work for me. Every man gets as much as he earns each day,

and we are doing well. I have not dared go back to Mr. Bentley's ranch, but now I can keep from there no longer, and we are going."

It was a most interesting story, and it gave Frank food for reflection.

Frank ate supper with the black fellows, nearly all of whom were ugly and repulsive, appearing very little like Wangalee.

After supper he looked after his horse, and found the animal all right.

The moon had risen, and at some distance on the plain the boy discerned a moving object. He watched it closely for some time, and saw it gradually draw nearer the camp.

Wangalee's attention was drawn to this object too.

"It is a kangaroo," he said.

Frank secured his rifle and waited for the kangaroo to come a little nearer, which it finally did.

At last the boy took quick but careful aim at the animal and fired.

As he did so there was a shrill scream, and the kangaroo leaped into the air, then fell to the ground.

"Great Scott!" gasped Frank. "That was like the cry of a human being!"

He ran out to where the creature was stretched in the moonlight. As he bent over it he started back with an exclamation of horror.

On the ground lay a man who had been disguised by the skin of a great kangaroo! He was not dead, and he flung the animal's skin aside, as if it smothered him.

The face exposed was that of John Jones!

CHAPTER XIV.

MORGAN'S RETURN.

"Curse you!" huskily whispered the miserable wretch, "you have fixed me! In that way you saved your life, for I was getting close to the camp that I might find an opportunity to finish you."

Wangalee came up behind Frank and obtained a look at the face of the wounded man. A cry of surprise broke from his lips.

"Jones!" he exclaimed. "Ah! that is

one thing why I was going back to Bentley's ranch. I was going to tell Mr. Bentley what I have learned about you since I have been away."

"So it is you, you black snake!" panted the wounded man. "Well, you have come too late!"

"Too late?"

"Yes."

"I'll not be too late to tell him what I have learned about you. I'll not be too late to tell him that his foreman is Brown Bob, on whose head there is a price."

"Brown Bob!" cried Frank Merriwell. "Is this man Brown Bob?"

"Yes, he is the worst outlaw in this country. He has been pursued so closely that he was forced to adopt some ruse to escape capture. No one has suspected that John Jones, foreman on Mark Bentley's ranch, could be Brown Bob, and so he fooled everybody. Four weeks ago I saw an officer who was searching in the mountains for the outlaw. He showed me his picture and described him fully. In doing so, he spoke of a peculiar bit of tattooing on Brown Bob's arm. I had seen it once by accident on the arm of this man. Here it is."

He grasped the wounded man's wrist and thrust his sleeve back above his left elbow, exposing some tattooing on the forearm. The tattooing was a skull and cross bones, surrounded by a wreath of flowers. Beneath were the letters "R. C."

"R. C." said Frank Merriwell. "What do they stand for?"

"Robert Carter, Brown Bob's true name."

"But I thought his true name was Robert Hawkins."

Something like a gurgling laugh came from the wounded man's lips.

"Fool ye!" he huskily whispered. "Got tired of having you stopping at the ranch. Wanted Morgan to go on, so the boys could follow him to place where he found his gold. Told Bentley his name was Brown Bob. His name is Rob Hawkins, and he was a convict same time I was. He escaped—didn't serve out his time. He didn't recognize me, but I did him. That's all."

"And he was driven from the ranch through your lie!"

"Oh, the trick worked all right. Reynolds thought it wouldn't."

"It was a shame! Poor Morgan!"

The wounded man had a severe fit of coughing, and Frank would have examined his injury, but he snarled:

"Let me alone! You soaked me straight through the body! It fixes me! I'm going fast now!"

"If there is anything we can do for you——"

"The best doctor in the country can't save me."

"You may be wrong."

"No, I know, for I've seen too many men hit this way. It is a finisher. But there's one satisfaction. Reynolds did not fail, and that black dog will not find the girl at Bentley's."

He glared at Wangalee, who cried:

"The girl! Do you mean Miss Bentley?"

"Yes, I mean the fool girl who fell in love with you—you, a dirty black dog! You will not find her at the ranch."

The man's voice sunk to a broken whisper, and he seemed to be breathing his last.

Wangalee was wildly excited.

"He must not die till he tells what he means by it!" cried the native. "Don't let him die!"

"Bring some water," directed Frank.

One of the shearers hastened to bring some water in a tin cup, and Frank held it to the lips of the dying man.

The outlaw succeeded in swallowing a little, and then he was easier.

"Thanks," he said, coolly. "I came near slipping my wind that time. It's pretty hard to be downed by a kid!"

"Tell me," panted Wangalee—"tell me what you meant!"

"When I said you would arrive too late?"

"Yes! yes! Is she married?"

"No, but she'd better be. Reynolds has her. He has carried her off into the mountains, and Bentley will never see her again."

A loud cry came from Wangalee's lips, while Frank was for the moment like one dazed by a blow.

"I know now," he thought. "Last night I saw Reynolds pass along the val-

ley with her in his arms, and I heard her utter a cry of distress."

At this moment one of the black fellows called attention to a horseman who was bearing down upon the camp.

For the moment the dying man was forgotten, and all paid attention to the horseman, who came straight onward, for all of the challenge he received.

The moonlight fell on his face, and showed that the horse bore a double burden.

"It's Morgan!" cried Frank, joyously. "It's Morgan—and he has Miss Bentley with him!"

Morgan saw Frank and he lifted the girl to the ground.

"Take her back to Mark Bentley," he said, "and tell him that Rob Hawkins, the convict, saved her from the worst fate that could befall her."

In a moment he had whirled about and was riding away. In vain Frank called to him; he kept on. The boy rushed to his own horse, mounted and pursued. As well might he have pursued the wind. Hours later he came riding back into the camp—alone.

Brown Bob was dead and Vauna Bentley was talking with Wangalee.

Frank went alone by himself. He was sad and low spirited and longed to fly from Australia—to hasten back to America.

* * * * *

Mark Bentley's daughter was restored to him by Wangalee, but the "black fellow" claimed none of the glory of her rescue.

She told how Morgan had come down on Reynolds and the other ruffians like a whirlwind—how he had fought them all and destroyed them one by one. She said he was a brave and noble man.

"And to think I should drive him from my house by my accusations!" cried Mark Bentley, sorrowfully.

"And to think I could believe him an outlaw and desperado!" exclaimed Frank Merriwell.

Frank remained at the ranch several days, vainly hoping that Morgan might appear. But Morgan did not come, and Frank decided that he must go at last.

When he departed, he left a letter to

be delivered to Morgan, in case the gold hunter ever appeared.

Mr. Bentley and Vauna urged him to stay longer. Gogo shed tears when he departed. Wangalee grasped his hand and said:

"It is useless; the blood of the white man and the black is like water and oil. The black man who tried to be like the whites is a fool. Good-by."

When Frank went away, Wangalee was still at the ranch, and the boy wondered if there could be a union between him and Vauna Bentley at last. Somehow, from those final words of Wangalee, he was led to believe that the "black fellow" knew it would not be right, and would run away again when the right time came.

[THE END.]

"FRANK MERRIWELL IN THE SOUTH SEAS; or, THE CAST FOR LIFE," by the author of "Frank Merriwell," will be published in the next number (38) of the TIP TOP LIBRARY.

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